

V.—*Notes and Descriptions of some Birds lately added to the Museum, Canterbury, New Zealand.* By THOS. H. POTTS.

THE number of species contained in our list of birds is slowly but steadily increasing as our scattered population gradually spreads itself over wider areas of country; thus new forms now and then fall under observation. Among the more interesting of recent acquisitions is a new species of *Apteryx*, which the writer proposes to name *A. haastii*, in compliment to Dr. Haast. In the course of the year large numbers of skins and skeletons of the too famous *Apterygidæ*, killed on the west coast, are received at the Canterbury Museum for the purpose of exchanges; so that one can imagine it within the bounds of probability that *Apteryges* will, at no distant date, be found more abundant in foreign collections of natural history and “the cabinets of the curious” than in their native wilds of the Westland ranges. Amongst scores of examples of our two Middle-Island birds, *A. oweni*, Gould, and *A. australis*, Shaw, was one skin of this new species.

The specimen which first came to hand was procured on one of the first levels from the snowy range, west coast, Middle Island. A Maori of Bruce Bay informed the collector that they (the natives) called this species of *Apteryx* Roroa, that it was not to be confused with Rowi, and that, by means of kicking, it could fight a dog. Specimen the second was received some months later, in another heavy consignment. The exact locality was not given; but there is but little room to doubt that it was obtained from the Okarito country. When one looks at these specimens, grouped with others, representing *A. oweni* and *A. australis*, one ponders on the probability of hybridization*. Here are the lunate marks of Owen’s Kiwi, with the superior size and much of the tone of colour which distinguishes *A. australis*. The wing-spur of our new species is more feebly developed than in either of the other species mentioned.

APTERYX HAASTI, Potts. “Roroa;” Haast’s Kiwi.

Specimen No. 1 (supposed to be an adult female).—Face,

* See Transactions of New-Zealand Institute, vol. ii. p. 64, vol. iii. p. 80 (*Rhipidura*).

head, and neck dull brown, darkest in a line from the gape to and immediately behind the ear, and on the nape; upper surface irregularly barred with blackish brown and rich fulvous, each feather crossed with marks of dark brown and fulvous (approaching chestnut) on the apical bars; chin greyish brown; throat dull brown, indistinctly marked with fulvous; breast and abdomen dull brown, barred with pale fulvous; straggling hairs about the base of the bill black, some produced to the extent of $3\frac{1}{2}$ inches; bill yellowish ivory, measuring from gape to the end of mandible $5\frac{5}{8}$ inches; upper mandible overreaching lower mandible by $\frac{5}{16}$ of an inch; tarsus $2\frac{1}{2}$ inches; middle toe and claw $2\frac{5}{8}$ inches.

Specimen No. 2.—Face, head, and neck dark brown; blackish brown on the nape; entire plumage richer in colour than in specimen No. 1; on the back of thigh a chestnut bar; a band of chestnut crossing the plumage above the tarsal joint; upper mandible, from gape to point, $5\frac{3}{8}$ inches; tarsus $2\frac{1}{2}$ inches; middle toe and claw $2\frac{3}{4}$ inches.

APTERYX AUSTRALIS, Shaw. Great Kiwi.

A beautiful variety of this interesting species of the Middle-Island Kiwi departs in a remarkable degree from the usual state of plumage. Face, head, chin, throat, and the front of the neck white; back of neck dull greyish brown; a wide streak of white on the front of the thighs, white interspersed on the breast and abdomen; a circlet of white immediately above the tarsal joint.

A very fine female specimen of Owen's Kiwi has a broad patch of white on the rump, another patch immediately behind the wing.

After looking over numbers of specimens of all the known species, including the rich-coloured *A. mantelli*, Bartl., of the North Island, one arrives at the conclusion that no specific character can be safely drawn from the skin of the tarsus being scutellate or reticulate.

RALLUS PICTUS, Potts. Painted Rail.

Early in the month of March there was received at the Canterbury Museum a fine specimen of the Rail family which had been obtained in the neighbourhood of the Okarito lagoon,

Westland. This handsome bird, at first sight, bears a strong resemblance to *Rallus pectoralis*, Gould, from the similarity in the colours and markings of its plumage; a closer examination discloses its superior size and more slender figure, some difference in the shape of the bill, and a well-defined garter above the tarsal joint, thus showing a marked departure from the form of its better-known congener.

The bill differs from that of *R. pectoralis* in presenting a form less wedge-like, more produced, with the culmen slightly raised; the shallow furrows in which the lateral nostrils are pierced are less angular; this organ also possesses a greater degree of flexibility; that it is comparatively weaker, one may judge from the relative measurements of the bills of the two species:—

	<i>R. pectoralis.</i>		<i>R. pictus.</i>	
	in.	lin.	in.	lin.
Length of upper mandible from gape. . . .	1	5	1	7
Length of under mandible	1	3 $\frac{3}{4}$	1	6 $\frac{1}{2}$
Width of bill at base		3 $\frac{1}{2}$		3
Depth of bill at base		4 $\frac{1}{2}$		3 $\frac{1}{2}$

In addition to the peculiarities of the bill thus pointed out, it possesses a leg better adapted for wading than that of the closely allied species; the tibia is bared of feathers to the width of half an inch above the tarsal joint. It is not surprising that, amidst the dense tangled thickets of rush or cane that border the swampy lagoons of the west coast, it has hitherto generally eluded observation. Considering the shy, retiring habits of the group to which it belongs, it would there find abundant shelter for concealment, whilst its slender form, its compressed figure, almost canoe-like, is wonderfully well fitted for rapidly threading the intricate mazes of the rank aquatic or semiaquatic vegetation amidst which it finds its food. From its short concave wings, it is evident it must depend less on securing safety by flight than on the rapidity with which it can conceal itself from notice amongst the marshy vegetation of its favourite haunts. If the bill of *R. pectoralis* may be said to resemble somewhat that of *Ocydromus*, that of *R. pictus* rather shows an approach to that of *R. aquaticus*, less produced. We have heard, on very good authority, that a larger species of Rail remains yet to be procured amongst the morasses of Westland.

Bill, upper mandible dark horn-colour, lower mandible lighter; crown, occiput, and nape olive-brown, marked with black; from the base of upper mandible a narrow line of white passes in almost a straight line above the eye, merging into pale grey as it descends obliquely towards the nape; a broad stripe of chestnut commences at the base of the bill, passes through the eye, across the cheek, and meets in a broad band at the back of the neck, forming a richly coloured tippet, widest on the back of the neck; lower part of the cheek and throat pale grey and brownish grey; chin greyish, almost white; lower part of throat and breast black, each feather marked transversely with two bars of white, indistinctly tipped with pale brown; breast crossed with a band of rich but light brown, with a chestnut spot in the centre, basal portion of each feather black, apical portion crossed with two narrow black bars, shafts white; greater wing-coverts olive-brown, with occasional white and black spots, point of shoulders nearly white; primaries, of which the 2nd, 3rd, and 4th are nearly of the same length and longest, 3rd and 4th chestnut, barred on the inner and outer web with black; 1st and 2nd marked with bars of white, which on inner web are slightly crescentic: abdomen black, barred with white, lower abdomen pale fulvous; front of thighs fulvous, back of thighs slaty black: tail, shafts black, webs olive brown, darkest in the centre; middle feather with four spots of white, centre feathers of under tail-coverts black, with white bars tipped with fulvous; vent black, tipped with deep fulvous. Bill, from gape to tip of upper mandible, 1 inch 7 lines; wing, from plume, 6 inches 2 lines; tarsus 1 inch 8 lines; middle toe and claw 1 inch 7 lines, hind toe and claw 6 lines; tail 2 inches 9 lines; extreme length, from tip of mandible to end of tail, 15 inches 9 lines.

LARUS BULLERI, Potts. Buller's Gull.

The structure of this graceful sea-bird exhibits a gradual departure from our typical form of *Larus*, as in *L. scopulorum*, Forst., with which and *L. melanorhynchus*, Buller, it has been hitherto confused. An examination of the structure of the bill, the tarsus, and the foot, shows an approach to the *Sternidæ*

in their more slender proportions, equally manifest in the slight bill, the delicate tarsus, and the feeble foot. Should this Gull be allowed as a good species, it is proposed to call it after Mr. Buller, whose name is already connected with the ornithology of New Zealand. Two specimens in the Canterbury Museum were obtained near the mouth of the Waimakeriri river in this province.

Plumage white; wings silver-grey: primaries, first black, with white shaft, first and second having an oar-shaped dash of white on the inner web, this mark slightly encroaching on the outer web; third feather, basal portion chiefly white; fourth feather, inner web silver grey, margined with black; all primaries except the first, tipped with a white spot: bill yellowish, slightly stained on each mandible, near the point, with horn-colour; tarsi and feet yellowish, claws black. Bill from gape 1 inch 9 lines, depth of bill at base $3\frac{1}{2}$ lines, width of bill 3 lines; wing, from flexure, 11 inches 3 lines; tarsus 1 inch 7 lines; middle toe, with claw, 1 inch 5 lines; total length 14 inches 6 lines.

Ohinatahi,

Canterbury, July 21, 1871.

VI.—*A Revision of the Species of the Fringilline Genus Sycalis.*

By P. L. SCLATER, M.A., Ph. D., F.R.S.

(Plates II. & III.)

IN 'The Ibis' for January last, I attempted to give some account of the present state of our knowledge of the species of the Fringilline genus *Spermophila*. I now propose to offer to the readers of this Journal some similar remarks on the members of the genus *Sycalis*, another characteristic type of the Neotropical Fringillidæ, of which I have of late years accumulated a considerable series of specimens. My collection of this genus consists of 40 skins, referable to 8 species. I have likewise employed for comparison 18 specimens belonging to the collection of Messrs. Salvin and Godman, and referable to 6 species, and have examined the specimens in the French National Collection, where several important types are to be found.